

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6387

As Reported By House Committee On:
Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to Puget Sound Dungeness crab licenses.

Brief Description: Concerning the holders of Puget Sound Dungeness crab fishing licenses.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Spanel, A. Anderson, Snyder, Haugen, Roach and Kohl).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Natural Resources: 2/23/96 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Fuhrman, Chairman; Buck, Vice Chairman; Pennington, Vice Chairman; Regala, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Beeksma; Hatfield; Sheldon and L. Thomas.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative B. Thomas.

Staff: Rick Anderson (786-7114).

Background: The Puget Sound commercial Dungeness crab fishery is a limited-entry fishery regulated by the Department of Fish and Wildlife. In order to maintain eligibility for a license to this fishery a person must harvest a 1,000 pounds of crab over a two-year period.

Summary of Amended Bill: The Fish and Wildlife Commission is authorized to open the Puget Sound commercial fishery from October 1 to April 15. If the commission closes or does not open the fishery, it must hold a public hearing in the north Puget Sound area. The commission must consider certain factors prior to closing the commercial fishery. Prior to closing the fishery, a majority of commissioners must vote to close the fishery, and the closure must be enacted in a way that permits fishers adequate time to remove their gear.

Each license holder may use up to 100 pots. The 1,000 pound landing requirement is repealed. A person who holds two licenses or two persons who each hold a license may fish from the same vessel.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill: The striking amendment (1) adds an intent section; (2) deletes provisions relating to recreational crab zones and to a size limitation on recreational crab pots; and (3) deletes a provision requiring a supermajority vote of commissioners to close the commercial season.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The bill is not an attempt to micromanage the fishery or to affect allocation between recreational and commercial crabbers. The bill is needed to protect markets that have been developed by commercial crab fishers. In order to have stable markets, one needs stable fishing seasons. The commercial crab fishers were not properly notified of the season closure and were later forced to fish in severe weather. The actions of the Department of Fish and Wildlife last season caused a great deal of anxiety to the families of commercial crab fishers.

Testimony Against: The recent federal court decision by Judge Rafeedie requires a reduction in the Puget Sound crab harvest by non-tribal entities. One of the tools to manage crab harvests is the length of seasons. This bill removes an important management tool from the commission. Most commercially caught crabs are harvested within the first six weeks of the season. After the commercial season it is very difficult for recreational fisheries to catch crabs. This bill does affect allocation between non-tribal commercial and recreational crab fishers. The recreational crab fishery brings in more money to the state than does commercial crab fishing. This bill will result in fewer crabs available to recreational crabbers and less money to the state. Sportsmen are often faced with emergency closures without the benefit of hearings. Commercial crab fishers should not get special treatment.

Testified: Bill Dewey, Taylor United Inc.; Tom Burton, Barb Sobjack, Ed Knudsen, John Rantz, and Joe Verdoes, Inner Sound Crab Association (all pro). Gary Krein, Charterboat Association of Puget Sound; Don Freeman, Olympic Boat Centers; Steven Wright, Puget Sound Anglers; J.D. Wade, newspaper columnist; Bob Nelson, citizen; Jack Swanberg, Northwest Marine Trade Association (all con). Ed Manary, Department of Fish and Wildlife.